An Enlarged Prostate May Actually Reduce Prostate Cancer Risk

A diagnosis of benign prostatic hyperplasia could protect against prostate cancer development.

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No man wants to develop an enlarged prostate, and the onset of urinary symptoms, along with the knowledge that the prostate gland is getting larger, may raise fears of an increased risk for prostate cancer. But the opposite may be true—an enlarged prostate might be protective.

Recent study findings published in the medical journal The Prostate show that this condition—called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)—might significantly reduce a man's chances of developing prostate cancer, according to a press release issued by Beaumont Health, Michigan's largest health care system.

BPH is characterized by an abnormal enlargement of the prostate gland, resulting in partial blockage of the flow of urine in older males.

For the study, a research team from Beaumont Health's radiology, radiation oncology and urology department examined the prostate tissue of 405 male patients who received an MRI and biopsy and/or had surgery to partially or completely remove their prostate gland between January 2019 and January 2021.

Scientists measured the thickness of the central and outside part of the prostate gland to assess the possibility of disease. Results showed that an increase in the size thickness of the gland was linked with a decreased presence of prostate cancer.

"People often confuse an enlarged prostate gland with cancer given their symptoms and believe increased size is due to abnormal growth," said Kiran R. Nandalur, MD, the vice chief of diagnostic radiology and molecular imaging at Beaumont and the lead study author. "Our research showed patients with an enlarged prostate appear to have lower odds of significant prostate cancer."

The mechanical pressure of an enlarged prostate gland may actually inhibit cancer growth. That raises the possibility that common drugs used to treat BPH by shrinking the prostate may actually increase prostate cancer risk. Nandalur added that the findings "may also explain why previous data has shown commonly prescribed drugs used to treat BPH may result in higher-grade prostate cancer."

However, he stressed that management of an enlarged prostate requires personalized treatment after a consultation with a doctor.

To learn more about prostate cancer treatment, read “Half of Men on Active Surveillance for Prostate Cancer Switch Over to Treatment.”

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